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Book Review of *Stone by Stone: Exploring Ancient Sites on the Canadian Plains* by Liz Bryan

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Stone by Stone: Exploring Ancient Sites on the Canadian Plains. By Liz Bryan. Surrey, BC: Heritage House, 2005. 176 pp. Maps, photographs, suggested reading, index of sites. \$24.95 paper.

Liz Bryan begins her book with a description of the Canadian Plains: “. . . a voluptuous landscape of hills and valleys and plains, of lakes and tiny twinkling potholes, of flower-filled coulees and vast sand dunes.” Her emphasis throughout on the landscape of southern Saskatchewan and Alberta is necessary since the ancient monuments she describes only truly resonate within this setting. Indeed, almost every page of this attractive book is adorned with at least two color images—of scenery, stone features, artifacts, and aboriginal events. She then proceeds to an eclectic overview of the archaeological record of the Plains of Saskatchewan and Alberta, including the earliest human evidence, such as the Clovis points from the Wally’s Beach site, Alberta, where the trackways of mammoths, camels, and muskoxen were miraculously and briefly exposed in the late 1990s. There is one perplexing error, however—the attribution of the extinction of the ice age bestiary, about 12,000 years ago, to the meteorite that felled the dinosaurs!

Bryan next introduces bison and Northern Plains aboriginals’ relationship to them. She discusses buffalo

rubbing stones and buffalo jumps—with descriptions of the Head-Smashed-In, Old Women's, Gull Lake, and Roan Mare jumps. She also describes ribstones, larger stones in vague bison shapes and carved with grooves and cupules.

To introduce her discussion of tipi rings, the author includes a substantial account of the tipi itself. The section on medicine wheels is especially detailed, Bryan noting the uniqueness of each “wheel” and describing several with great specificity, including British Block, Majorville, and Moose Mountain, as well as the possible astronomical sight lines at some of these.

Under stone effigies we learn about the Napi figures—humanoid forms picked out with stones. Also considered here are two turtle outlines and a unique bison effigy, all in far southern Saskatchewan. Bryan also discusses rock art, especially that at Writing-on-Stone in southernmost Alberta. In Saskatchewan, the set of inscribed images, including bison and bear tracks, at the St. Victor cliff top is also remarkable. Bryan goes on to describe rock paintings in the mountain flank of western Alberta, including an inexplicable set at Grotto Canyon. These include a unique image of the southwestern Kokopelli.

The volume ends with observations on vision quest sites and a few other significant locations such as Old Man's Bowling Green, Cluny Earth Lodge Village, Blackfoot Crossing, and Wanuskewin. To a considerable extent, this is a guidebook—including maps to facilitate actual site visits. As an archaeologist, I am vaguely disquieted by this latter aspect; however, the sites involved are well known and already subjected to frequent visitation. Obviously, it is important for contemporary, non-Native occupants of the Northern Plains to visit some of these sites and incorporate them into their current cultural landscape. Bryan, therefore, is contributing to a necessary and growing sense of connection by the “newcomers” to the natural and cultural landscape of the Northern Plains.

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